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Marissa Tashenberg

Bowling Green State University

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STUDENT-ATHLETE PERCEPTIONS OF ACADEMIC SUPPORT
SERVICES AT MAC INSTITUTIONS

Marissa Tashenberg

Master's Project

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Project Advisor

Dr. Amanda Paule-Koba

Second Reader

Dr. Ray Schneider

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INTRODUCTION

At the crux of it all, the glory of intercollegiate athletics is reliant upon the wins and losses accrued by the young men and women who are competing for their respective teams. A boat race, between Harvard and Yale in 1852 embedded the idea that winning was paramount. Baseball and football were soon to follow and took the nation by storm. From that point on, this “multibillion dollar industry has thrust student-athletes into the spotlight of media attention” (Kennedy, 2007, p. 1). This media attention and social stratosphere of intercollegiate athletics put a lot of pressure on these young men and women. Student-athletes struggle with the task of balancing a winning athletic career as well as trying to juggle the academic requirements at their institution. Coupled with these challenges is the commonly known description of ‘dumb jocks’ placed on these young men and women and perceived special accommodations by university faculty and staff. It seems that the NCAA has tried tirelessly to combat these perceptions.

Winning was important then and winning is the determining factor of success in our modern culture today (Crowley, 2013). Aside from the wins and losses, it is important to recognize the other concern for student-athletes completing for their university, academics. Since 1906, academic performance has been a topic of conversation during national conventions of athletic officials (Crowley, 2013). While noticing an increase in the university admission of student-athletes with less than impressive academic standing, a convention held in 1965 agreed upon what became known as the 1.600 rule, stating that a prospective student-athlete must hold at least a 1.6 GPA to be admitted into the university (Crowley, 2013). This rule had a lot of push back and was eventually adjusted.

The NCAA has made is clear on their website that “It’s our commitment – and our responsibility – to give young people opportunities to learn, play and succeed” (ncaa.org, n.d.

para. 1). So, over time the NCAA has implemented academic standards that student-athletes, with the help of universities and athletic departments must meet. For instance, one regulation, “implemented in 2003 as part of an ambitious academic reform effort in Division I, the Academic Progress Rate (APR) holds institutions accountable for the academic progress of their student-athletes” (ncaa.org, Division 1, para. 1). These academic standards are quite often met with the help of academic support services provided by the universities.

According to Robbins (2008) every Division 1 program in the nation is required by the NCAA to provide tutoring support services to the student-athletes at that institution. The tutoring is often coupled with academic mentoring, career development and community engagement pieces. Student-athlete academic support units often vary in size depending on the resources of the university. Often times, the academic standing and progress of student-athletes are discussed with a negative connotation and the NCAA is “criticized for ignoring the ‘educational experience’ of student-athletes, they have responded by instituting several increasingly stringent academic reform packages designed to ensure academic preparedness and successful completion of a degree” (Kennedy, 2007, p. 3). This research project will dive into the perceived achievement of these services according to student-athletes at Mid-American Conference affiliated schools. Understanding the perceptions and performance of academic support units will help the furthering and growth of programs and support units in the future.

Significance of Study

The expansion and growth of collegiate athletics in modern society has greatly increased the amount of scrutiny that has been placed on the structure and performance of the student-athlete population not only on the field but in the classroom as well. As Kennedy (2007) states, “demands placed on student-athletes force these students to sacrifice their attention to academics

making it difficult for them to succeed academically” (p. 11). The goal of my study is to assist academic support services staff understand how the student-athletes view the quality of services being provided, which may improve the quality of work produced in such an environment. This study will be key to investigating the effectiveness of academic support services provided to student-athletes. The resulting data from this study could be utilized by all universities in the Mid-American Conference to determine if the current academic support services being offered are meeting standards of effectiveness and quality. This study may also assist athletic departments and conference offices when training and educating the staff that is providing these services to the student-athletes.

Research Questions

The following research questions are being examined in this study.

1. What are student-athletes’ impressions of student-athlete academic support services?
2. What aspects of student-athlete services do student-athletes find beneficial?
3. What were student-athlete beliefs about student-athlete services prior to enrolling in university? How are those beliefs different now?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This research will examine the perceptions of academic support services of Division 1 collegiate athletes currently enrolled at universities in the Mid-American Conference (MAC). In order to understand the dynamics of being a student-athlete and the academic and athletic rigor placed on these young men and women it is important to explore the literature. To start, I researched the relationship between intercollegiate athletics and academics. This will allow me to set the framework for the modern coexistence of the two. Next, I explored the role of academic advisors within athletic departments as well as the academic measures that are being

used to evaluate the performance of student-athletes in the classroom. The challenges student-athletes face, stereotypes and the student-athlete identity will all be evaluated to assist in laying the framework for evaluating the student-athlete perception of academic support services.

Finally, I express the significance of this research.

History of College Athletics & Higher Education

Nearly two hundred years before the first intercollegiate sporting activity, higher education has been in existence in the United States. Founded solely based on rigorous study and a religious lifestyle, higher education was not concerned about incorporating trivial activities into its foundations (Gerdy, 2007). As small groups of individuals formed informal teams and competed in various sporting activities in the late 1800s, the idea of athletics as a rapidly growing attraction became more appealing for institutional leaders, especially because of the revenue generating capabilities. From then on athletics shifted from student-run enterprises to formalized endeavors incorporated into the universities oversight (Gerdy).

Fast forward to the 1920s, not only were stadiums rapidly being built but “stars such as Red Grange of Illinois and the legendary Four Horsemen of Notre Dame helped make college football rival baseball as the preeminent American game” (Sloan, 2005, p. 17). The 1930s led to the involvement of notable alumni became a large aspect of the collegiate athletic world. While athletic programs were trying to produce more revenue than they were spending, attracting wealthy alumni through their campaigns of publicizing a successful athletic program became imperative to fund such activities (Duderstadt, 2000).

As many people were seeing the positive aspects and obvious reasons for the incorporation of athletics in the collegiate setting, it was also crucial to justify its purpose in relationship to the realm of academia. It was argued that participating in athletics served as a

complementary aspect to the formal education one would receive in a lecture hall or classroom.

As Gerdy (2007) explained:

The assertion that participation in athletics was educational in that it helped build the character of those involved was perpetuated by coaches and athletic administrators and embraced by higher education leaders, state politicians, the public, and most of the media, faculty, and students. (p. 33)

From this point forward, universities refined their messages and promoted collegiate athletics as a way to generate revenue, create prestige through mass entertainment and build character of the students participating. Conferences were created and were initially organized so that the faculty from member institutes would be in charge. On the contrary, Dr. James Duderstadt (2000) recognized that the “real power has resided with the coaches and the athletic directors” (p. 115). According to Diehl (2009), “Today[’s] athletic conferences look far different from those early conferences (that began just over a century ago)” (p. 9). Instead, conferences have transformed to contractually driven legal corporations that negotiate and compete based on broadcasting rights and other monetary aspects involved with collegiate competition (Duderstadt, 2000).

In 1906, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) was created (Sack, 2008). The NCAA along with the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) and the National Junior College Athletics Association (NJCAA) were the three governing bodies that an institution could choose to be a part of. The NCAA, “portrayed itself as the defender of the integrity of college sports, [but] in reality this was primarily a public relations effort, aimed at deflecting criticism rather than exploring more fundamental reforms” (p. 118). The NCAA has been marred with scandals revolving around the integrity of college athletic programs, how student-athletes were performing academically, and the soaring costs of sustaining intercollegiate

athletics (Rader, 2009) time and time again.

Academic Measures

When the NCAA was founded in 1906, there was little control over the participation and regulation of sport. During the first fifty years of the organizations existence, the NCAA depending largely on the individual institutions to maintain order and uphold the academic standards of its athletes. The popularity and commercial value of sport drastically increased during this time. With the increased attention focused on intercollegiate athletics there was a need to establish some uniform academic standards for all intuitions to comply with. The association implemented the 1.6 rule in 1965 which soon was eliminated because it was confusing. Over eight years later, the American Council of Education worked tirelessly to develop and pass legislation that would “establish a specific high school core curriculum that a student would have to pass with a minimum 2.000 GPA” (Crowley, 2013, p. 64). Within this legislation, known as “Proposition 48,” which was to take effect in 1986, the prospective student-athlete would also have to achieve, according to Crowley (2013), a “700 combined verbal and math score on the SAT or a 15 composite score on the ACT” (p.64). This legislation was a step in the right direction for the academic standards and progress in intercollegiate athletics but it saw a lot of change in the years to come.

Since the mid-1900s, intercollegiate athletics and the NCAA has made tremendous strides in creating academic measures to uphold academic standards within athletics. Graduation Success Rates (GSR), and Academic Progress Rates (APR) are a couple academic measures that are recorded annually by institutions and reported to the NCAA. Graduation Success Rates, which were approved for use in 2003, are a bit different in the sense that “student-athletes who leave institutions before graduation and in good standing do not adversely affect the rates, and

transfers who enter in good standing can be included” (Crowley, 2013, p. 166). These two calculations along with stronger continuing eligibility standards have enhanced and upheld the academic integrity at universities across the nation. One particular continuing eligibility standard that is imperative to the success and graduation of student-athletes is that they must “complete 40 percent of their graduation requirements by the start of their third year, 60 percent by the fourth year and 80 percent by the fifth” (Crowley, 2013, p. 167). For the most part, according to Crowley (2013), “annual reports have shown student-athletes graduating at a higher percentage than the overall student body and females performing at a higher academic rate than males” (p. 167).

The Academic Progression Rate was created to help institutions determine how well they are preparing and keeping their student-athletes on track to graduate. With APR, “each student-athlete is awarded one point for eligibility and one point for retention to the institution. These scores are calculated and reported, and institutions are recognized or possibly punished for meeting or not meeting the mandated cut-off score” (Kennedy, 2007, p. 17). Academic Progress Rate, according to Crowley (2013) is the “real time” measure of academic standing at a particular university.

A “promising chapter in academic reform” (Crowley, 2013, p.167) was opened when these different forms of academic legislation were implemented. The increased standards and the substantial ramifications for student-athletes and universities who do not meet the benchmarks established by the governing bodies are crucial if intercollegiate athletics is going to survive.

Role of Academic Advisors for Athletics

Since the tedious balance of athletics and academics is so critical for the success of the student-athletes enrolled in colleges and universities across the nation, nearly every school has

established an office devoted to the academic success of student-athletes. In June of 2015, the NCAA distributed \$26,540,000 to Division I member institutions for academic enhancement. This money, which breaks down to about \$75 thousand per institution is to be used for “capital improvements that enhance the academic services” (NCAA, 2015, p. 4).

All institutions benefit from the distribution of these funds and the NCAA has found through mandatory reporting that the most common uses for these funds include: funding additional salaries for more personnel, enhancement of the tutorial services and providing additional equipment such as laptops for the student-athlete’s use (NCAA, 2015). During the 2014-2015 academic year, the Mid-American Conference received \$898,188 from the Academic Enhancement Fund. According to the distribution plan, “institutions report on how the funds are used to enhance their academic programs and services for student-athletes” (NCAA, Division I revenue distribution, p. 4). The funds that were allocated during the 2014-2015 academic year were used as follows: \$14,264,000 (55%) was used for Institutional Academic or Programming Enhancements, \$10,417,000 (40%) was used for Educational Expenses, \$1,022,000 (4%) allocated towards Health and Safety Expenses while the remaining \$119,000 (<1%) was used for Personal or Family Expenses (NCAA, Division I revenue distribution, p. 4-5).

These offices, usually titled, student-athlete academic support services, or something comparable, are a critical piece to the puzzle for many student-athletes. Academic support services for student-athletes have become a necessary component within the university as more coaches and administrators becoming “concerned about the academic achievement and graduation rates of their student-athletes” (Underwood, 1984, p. 103). Within these departments, universities higher several people who are specialize in the academic counseling of this specific population.

Among the many roles of the academic advisor, assisting student-athletes in determining their major is another facet of their job, while “work[ing] in tandem with college advisors” (Gordon, Habley & Grites, 2011, p. 277). They assist student-athletes in “finding a balance that will allow them to maximize their athletics participation without necessarily sacrificing the academic course they want to pursue” (Brown, 2007, para. 47). Specific roles of the academic advisors also include and definitely are not limited to advising the student-athletes about their continuing eligibility and percentage towards degree completion, staying up to date with curriculum changes, be able to identify student-athletes who may be at-risk of falling below the differing academic standards of the university and build rapport with student-athletes so an open and honest relationship can prosper.

With clear and trusting lines of communication between the academic support staff and the student-athletes, both parties will be able to identify specific academic and career goals so the student-athlete has a well-rounded experience. It is important for the advisor to be “mature, ethical, knowledgeable, and sensitive, understanding the needs of the student athlete as well as those of the institution” (Underwood, 1984, p. 108). One thing to note about the purpose of the academic advisors is that they serve as “liaisons between teachers and coaches” (Mader, 2003, p. 16). As well as serving as a connection between teachers and coaches, academic advisors also, “are the link between student athletes and their academics. These are the people who know the most about what is going on with the academic lives of athletes” (Diehl, 2009, p. 34). While these offices are crucial to the success of student-athletes, it is important to note “academic-support programs should supplement, not replace, the academic counseling provided by the academic unit in which the student-athlete is enrolled” (Bailey, 1998, p. 88).

Programming (life skills, mental health, professional development)

According to Sloan (2005), “moral concerns relating to the lack of preparedness of many student-athletes” led to the development of development programming for student-athletes because “until the late 1970s and early 1980s, athletic advising took little interest in the personal development of the student-athletes” (p. 133-134). Rasnack (2011) states that, “life skills programs and programs aimed at teaching skills that will expand personal, social, and academic development are very advantageous in the transition into college” (p. 28).

In order to enhance the student-athlete experience and allow the student-athletes to reach their full potential in all aspect of their lives, the NCAA implemented the NCAA Life Skills program. This program, which used to be called “CHAMPS/Life Skills”, was introduced to member institutions in 1994 (NCAA, 2008). It was originally mirrored off of the Total Person Project that was created by Georgia Institute of Technology’s longtime athletic director, Dr. Homer Rice in 1986. According to Kennedy (2007), “the formalization of the program attempted to incorporate different aspects to serve the ‘total person’, including social, physical, mental and spiritual health” (p. 4). The Life Skills program seeks to develop student-athletes competencies in five content areas including “academics, athletics, personal development, career development and community service” (NCAA, 2008).

Many institutions across the nation have freshmen seminar classes aimed towards the specific needs of the first year students. In these classes students work to develop many educational skills, career skills such as networking and resume building. Many students are also introduced to topics that may challenge their morals and they are able to reflect on some controversial topics. Rasnack found that “freshman seminars have been found to be a good way to increase the retention and graduation rates, academic performance, and personal and social

growth of student-athletes” (p. 28).

Challenges student-athletes face

Student-athletes face a unique set of challenges from the second they arrive on campus their freshman year. It is to be recognized that all students entering college, student-athlete or not, are facing immense environment adjustments, whether it be relocation from home, managing money independently and reinitiating a social group; but student-athletes face a unique challenge of managing all of the previously stated challenges as well as the tricky art of juggling their academic case load as well as their athletic roles (Hughey, Nelson, Damminger & McCalla-Wriggins, 2012).

In the university setting, academic support services are usually offered to the entire student population. These services cover topics such as academic writing, mathematical assistance, specialized subject tutoring, and many more. The unique time constraints that student-athletes face often hinder them from being able to attend and utilize such services that usually have more traditional hours of service (Powell, 2009). Instead of being able to attend a resume workshop or mock interview session that the university is holding, student-athletes have to attend practice, film sessions, physical rehabilitation or they are traveling for their competitions.

When it comes to reinitiating social groups and establishing a group of friends, student-athletes may also face some unfair stereotypes from others at the university, including faculty and other student. These unfair presumptions about the character and work ethic of student-athletes can greatly impact a student-athletes success in the classroom. It has been stated that "prejudicial perceptions and biases toward student-athletes in revenue and non-revenue generating sports do exist among the faculty" (Hamilton & Sina, 2001, p. 40). Student-athletes

are viewed as “over privileged, pampered, lazy, out-of-control, and primarily motivated to attend school for the sole purpose of participating in intercollegiate athletics” (Watson, 2006, p. 36).

These predispositions impose false labels onto the entire student-athlete population, and although *some* student-athletes may actually be lazy or athletically motivated, that is not the case for the *majority* of the student-athlete population at universities.

Student-athlete Identity

Student-athlete identity is often a topic of contention in the media. It is often portrayed that student-athletes are only enrolled in college for athletic reasons. Having student-athletes, whom are particularly popular on social media, voice their opinions about their education has often projected a poor image on the entire student-athlete population at colleges and universities even when those thoughts, particularly about how pointless school is, are not shared by the majority of that population. This becomes an issue for this group of young people because “student-athletes relate so strongly to their athletic identity that the identity as a college student is sometimes lost” (Powell, 2009, p. 26). Their isolated lifestyle revolving around practice and competition often distracts student-athletes from being able to find their identity outside of athletics.

Parsons (2013) supports this idea in her article about perceptions and stereotypes surrounding student-athletes on campus, she states, “academic and athletic interests often appear to be in competition for the student-athlete's attention” (p. 410). Though the time constraints often hinder the student-athletes, NCAA research has found that “the majority of NCAA student-athletes (62% of women and 53% of men) very strongly identify as both students and athletes” (NCAA, 2013, para. 1). Research completed by Marx, Huffmon and Doyle (2008) found that nearly 71 percent of female collegiate athletes wanted to be remembered as students and athletes

in college. They also found that “few male (17 percent) and very few female (3 percent) athletes desired to be viewed solely as athletes in college” (para. 30).

It is important to understand student-athlete identity in order to understand the context of the world that these young men and women live in. the common misconceptions that the general population has for this group of people is clearly not aligned with what the actual student-athletes want to be remembered for. With research to back it up, it is obvious that the majority of student-athletes wish to be remembered as students *and* athletes, not just one or another. So this idea that they are “dumb jocks” is just hindering their ability to prosper in the university setting.

Stereotypes

We often hear about the idea of the ‘dumb jock’ when thinking about the idea of young men and women who are performing athletically for their university. Common misconceptions about the character and motivators for these individuals in the classroom often bundle them together into an unfair stereotyped group. Simons et al. (2007) identifies “low intelligence, little academic motivation and receipt of undeserved benefits and privileges” as the three main components that comprise the idea of ‘dumb jocks’ in the university setting (p. 251).

In a study conducted by Simons et al. (2007), 538 student-athletes at a Division 1 institution were surveyed to determine their perceptions on how other students and members of the faculty feel about their status as a student-athlete. The study found that many student-athletes, specifically 62.1% of those surveyed, reported that faculty members have made negative comments about their participation in athletics. Student-athletes were given a list of phrases and were asked to identify which of them they had heard the most from faculty. According to the results, student-athletes indicated that "expect special treatment," "only interested in sports," and "not academically qualified" were a few of the comments they heard

most often (p. 270).

In addition to the academic rigors, backlash of stereotypes, and the drastic change in environment, student-athletes are also under pressure and scrutiny from their coaches. According to Hollis (2001) in many cases, coaches are results driven: athletic results. The pressure on coaches to win games and matches is greater than it ever was before. Coaches are receiving pressure from alumni, boosters, and athletic department administrators to produce successful seasons. Thus, the pressures coaches are imparting on their student-athletes are higher. They are expecting more time devoted to perfecting their skills and exceling at their sport. Hollis says the increased dedication and loyalty to the success of athletic programs are “obstacles that can jeopardize a student athlete's success to educational opportunity” (p. 283).

METHODOLOGY

The current study was designed to examine student-athlete’s perceptions of academic support services. Further, this study sought to assess whether or not student-athletes felt that they were receiving useful and productive support when it comes to personal and career development when it comes to balancing the athletic rigor and academic pursuits. This study applied qualitative research strategies to study the current standing and issues revolving around the academic support services specifically for student-athletes at Mid American Conference institutions. Exploratory in nature, qualitative research assists the researcher in understanding detailed and information about a certain issue or topic.

Qualitative research is the best method for this research because it will allow for the diversity of perceptions within a given population to be determined through a qualitative survey. McMillan (2012) explains that qualitative researchers “believe that there are multiple realities represented in participant perspectives, and that context is critical in providing an understanding

of the phenomenon being investigated” (p. 273).

Participants

Participants for this study included 29 student-athletes who all compete at the Division I level at Mid-American Conference institutions. The selection of universities that were included in this study were chosen because of my ties to one of the universities with my graduate assistantship in Student-Athlete Services. There are a total of 12 universities that compete in the Mid-American Conference.

Participants included 20 women making them 69% of the total respondents and nine men accounting for 31%. Twenty-three individuals identified themselves as White, Non-Hispanic, three identified as Black, Non-Hispanic. Two student-athletes identify as Hispanic/Latino, while only one student-athlete identify as Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander and two or more races. According to the results, ten respondents participate in track & field, nine participate in cross country, four compete in swimming, three student-athletes play baseball, three play football, three play volleyball, two participate in soccer. The following sports all have results for one student-athlete: basketball, diving, golf, softball and wrestling. According to the results 10 were freshman, seven were sophomores, eight are juniors, two are seniors, one is a fifth year student and one is a graduate student.

Instruments

The information assessment method that was chosen for this study was a qualitative survey. McMillan (2012) explained that using surveys are quite effective, since it allows the researcher to have easy-access to the potential participants and it allows for quick responses to collect data. The survey (Appendix A) developed for this study included 22 questions that included a mixture of single selection questions, short answer, and Likert scale questions. Two

professors reviewed the survey to ensure that it encompassed what the researcher was seeking to learn.

Several demographic questions about the participant's age, gender, race were included followed by questions about their year in school and which sport(s) they participate in. Questions pertaining to the student-athlete's perceptions of student-athlete academic services were assessed through questions about the assistance they have received from their academic advisors and to what extent their advisors have gone to to assist with academic success. One question asks, "before you enrolled at the University, how important did you believe athletic academic support services office would be to your academic success?" to which the respondent answered based on a Likert Scale from very important to very unimportant. The participants were also asked the following questions, which they were asked to respond in short answer form. "Based on your experiences, what would you say the academic support services office does well? Please be specific" and "based on your experiences, are there any aspects of the academic support services office that do not meet your expectations or that you feel could be improved upon? Please be specific."

Procedure

This research study was submitted for approval to the Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB) at Bowling Green State University (See Appendix B). Once the study was approved, prospective participants were contacted via email (see Appendix C for a copy of the email that was sent to prospective participants). Approval was also granted from the ICA Research Subcommittee. (APPENDIX D) The recruitment email explained the reason for the research study and asked if the participants were willing to participate in the study. This email also included the informed consent form, which the participants were asked to read. Ensuring that

each participant understood that anything they reported through the survey would remain confidential. They were informed that only the researcher and her advisor would see the survey. Participants were also reminded that they were free to withdraw from this study at any time. The researcher and research advisor's contact information was provided to the participants in the case they had any questions or concerns about their participation in the study. If the participant agreed to participate in the study, they simply clicked on the link included in the email and that took them to the online survey. Two weeks after the survey was initially sent out, a reminder email was sent to encourage the potential participants to complete the survey if they were willing to participate.

Participation Rates/Response Rate

A total of 730 surveys were distributed to student-athletes participating at one Division I level at institutions in the Mid-American Conference. Data was collected through an online qualitative survey sent out in an email via a software program called Qualtrics. One email that was sent was not delivered. The total number of responses was 29, for a response rate of 0.039%. The low response rate may be due to the high number of emails student-athletes receive asking for their participation in research and the overall length of the instrument as the open-ended questions made up half of the 22 questions in the survey. In addition, the lack of response may indicate that many students do not check their email or respond to emails from people they do not have regular contact with.

Data Analysis

The data collected through the qualitative survey provided varied types of responses. The demographic questions resulted in very straightforward data, which needed little analysis. Supplementing the closed-ended/demographical items included in the survey, the participated

were asked to complete several open-ended questions. This format of questions allowed the participants to explain specific instances or comments about their perceptions pertaining to the specific questions asked.

To construct a theory of student-athletes perceptions of academic support services throughout the MAC, utilizing inductive analysis is the best approach for this type of research. According to Thomas (2003), the “purpose of the inductive approach is to allow research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant or significant themes inherent in raw data” (p. 2). The open-ended responses recorded were analyzed for different key words and themes. A general perception of academic support services was developed through the combination of answers and analysis from the closed-ended statistical answers and the open-ended opinion responses. This general perception can be useful for academic support services offices when evaluating their effectiveness in the academic progress of student-athletes at their institution.

RESULTS

This study sought to examine the perceptions of academic support services held by student-athletes who participate on a varsity athletic teams competing in the Mid-American Conference. This study was designed to determine the feelings on whether or not the athletic academic support services office at their respective universities are meeting the expectations regarding academic support, tutoring, mentoring, and career services.

Academic Services

In order to assess the perceptions about academic advising for athletes, it was important to understand what sort of services student-athletes are interested in utilizing, the survey asked them to identify services they have sought out in their time at the university. Tutoring received the most responses with 19 student-athletes selecting this option. Academic Major Planning was

the next highest reported tool utilized with 17 student-athletes selecting this option. One-on-One Advising was third with 16 responses (See chart). Five student-athletes sought out services for Career Advancement and finally three student-athletes sought assistance for Mental Health Support.

In follow up to this question, the student-athletes were asked which of the services they have sought out have actually benefit them in their lives. The responses were as follows:

Tutoring with 22 votes or 76% of the responses. Fifteen student-athletes feel they have benefit from Academic Major Planning. One-on-One Advising resulted in 13 of the 16 respondents feeling that they have benefit from this service. Five student-athletes sought out services for Career Advancement and according to the results all five of them feel that that service has ben beneficial. Though three student-athletes sought assistance for Mental Health Support only one reported that they feel they've benefit from this service.

Since tutoring is a major academic service offered to student-athletes, the survey had several dedicated questions to this aspect alone. The first question simply asked how effective the student-athletes felt the tutoring program is at their respective institution. They were given the choice of the following responses: extremely effective; effective; somewhat effective; not that effective and ineffective. Ten student-athletes felt that the tutoring program at their respective university in the MAC is extremely effective. Twelve felt it is effective. Five felt that the tutoring program is only somewhat effective while three student-athletes felt that the tutoring program was either not that effective or ineffective.

To explore the topic of tutoring a bit more, the student-athletes were asked to give their thoughts on the following topics: subject tutoring, tutoring times, and the tutor's knowledge of the subject they are tutoring. Perceptions pertaining to subject tutoring encompassed positive and

negative feedback. Answers included, “I think it's very smart to do and it really helps me especially if I miss class for games.” One student-athlete noted their institution “provide[s] tutoring for major subjects, but not some of the minor classes.” Other comments included, “some tutors are well knowledgeable, others are not” and “there are only a couple of options.” When it comes to the tutoring times available to student-athletes, one respondent noted that tutors “usually are pretty flexible with times especially with practice and traveling which is great” while another stated tutoring was “sometimes inconvenient because I couldn't schedule my times.”

Perceived importance of academic services

Follow up questions pertaining to how important the student-athletes believed the athletic academic support services office would be to their academic success were asked. Twenty student-athletes believed that these services would be “very important” to their success while the answer “very unimportant” was not selected at all. The respondents were also asked if the coach who recruited him/her told them anything specific to expect from the athletic academic support service office at that institution. Once again, twenty respondents indicated that their coach mentioned the office. Respondents expanded on these answers by indicating what his/her coach said about the services offered. One student-athlete stated that their coach “explained who my advisor was, what her roll would be in my education. They explained tutoring, study tables, the resources in our academic services department. They very much stressed the importance of the department.”

Participants were presented the question of whether or not they included their impression of the athletic academic support services office into their decision to commit to their respective institution. Eighteen student-athletes responded yes to this question with different reasoning such

as, “Yes, football will end one day,” “They preached that academics come before athletics and treat it that way,” and “bottom line I am a student first in my book. I think academics is important and I wanted to make sure I went to a school that had the same outlook on that.” For the eight participants that indicated they did not take into consideration the academic services offered during their recruitment, they stated the following reasons why not: “I felt baseball was more important to the decision,” and “I was not too invested in academics during my college search.”

For many of the participants, as indicated by their responses, perceptions about the athletic academic support services office have not changed since they enrolled. One response is as follows “Not really, other than I admire all the support that athletes have access to,” while a couple student-athletes indicated some changed opinions such as “Didn't think I would actually use them but I do” and “yes. I realized that I didn't need them to specifically help me with my work. They did help freshman year keeping a good schedule.”

When asked who on the coaching staff is responsible for the academic success of the team, many respondents answered “head coach,” this was nearly matched with the answer “everyone.” It was also important to understand what the student-athletes felt their academic advisor does to help him/her attain academic success. Without any prompts, student-athlete responses varied. Answers included: “Help me with time management and making sure I take all the right classes,” “Help schedule classes at times that fit in with practice, talk about different courses, help with major planning,” and “EVERYTHING. My advisor has helped me decide what classes to take, what major to choose, what career path I want to choose, and how to balance all the demands of being a student-athlete.” From these answers, participants were asked to indicate how helpful they think their athletic academic advisor is. They were given a scale of

answers and asked to choose one. The scale included the following levels of helpfulness: Very helpful, helpful, neutral, not very helpful, and not helpful at all. Sixty-nine percent of respondents indicated that their academic advisor is very helpful while only one respondent believes his/her advisor is not helpful at all.

Room for improvement

Based on the overall opinions of their academic advisor, requesting their thoughts on what they believe the athletic academic support services office does well will help us understand their perceptions. One student-athlete states, “they are the most involved of any athletic academic support that I’ve heard of when talking with friends who play sports at other D 1 schools.” Another statement reads, “They are thorough. They really care about each athletes academic success so they are constantly checking in on students (especially at risk students).” This question was followed up with asking what could be improved upon within these offices. Many of the participants responded that nothing could be improved upon, while some stated, “study table hours need to be lengthened on Fridays and Sundays. Those are the days I feel I get most of my work for the week done but if I don’t have study tables open, I have no quiet place to do my homework. Also, 8 study table hours a week is hard to attain, especially if you are in season. 8 hours is ridiculous, 6 hours is more reasonable.” One student also revealed, “sometimes if you are doing well you get neglected.” Student-athletes were asked if there were any additional services that could be offered to help them be successful, 14 answered that there weren’t any. One participant requested that he/she be provided “monthly meetings to make sure I am on track.”

Many themes were identified in the process of understanding the results of this study. Relationship building with advisors, flexible timing for meetings and tutoring, helping balance

time demands of sport and school were a few of the prominent themes in the answers of participants. These themes and patterns that emerged from the findings represent the understandings of experiences that student-athletes describe.

Finally, assessing the number of participants who have a college advisor who is not involved in athletics was important to see what sort of help was being given. Twenty participants indicated that they have a college advisor while three indicated they did not. Participants also stated that other than their athletic advisor, college advisor and the occasional help from family and coaches no one provided support for their academic success while at the university.

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to discover and evaluate the perceptions student-athletes have of the academic support offices for student-athletes at institutions competing in the Mid-American Conference. Student-athletes face a unique set of challenges due to their affiliation with such a time consuming and rigorous sport. This diverse population is challenged to balance both academics and athletic commitments while in college and it is imperative we strive to support them in any way possible to help them succeed. Academic success and failure of student-athletes has been a hot topic in the media and conversations in the world of college athletics. It is important to make sure that academic advisors and the support services staff within intercollegiate athletics are provided the best services possible to ensure that we are meeting and exceeding the needs of the student-athletes.

The review of literature played an important role when determining the current climate of college athletics in relationship to academics. Understanding the viewpoints of counselors, coaches, college professors and university administrators allows us to create a framework from which the student-athletes are functioning within. Previous studies have investigated academic

motivation (Tudor, 2014); academic performance of athletes versus regular students (Forster, 2012) and several have been done pertaining to the advisors' perspective of student-athlete's academic success (Diehl, 2009). This research revealed that student-athletes may face criticism and bias from college professors, their peers may think they are just "dumb jocks" and sometimes the pressure of succeeding on the playing surface may outweigh the importance of obtaining a useful degree. Though this research has provided insight into the world of academics as it relates to student-athletes, there seemed to be a lack of knowledge and research that addressed the actual perceptions of the student-athletes themselves. This research will benefit athletic departments throughout the MAC and conference offices when training and educating the staff that is providing these services to the student-athletes. Receiving quality feedback like the responses provided by student-athletes in this study will help improve the quality of work produced in environments like the student-athlete academic success offices.

The findings of this study revealed that from a big picture viewpoint, student-athletes, overall, are satisfied with the academic support provided by their athletic academic counselor at their institution but there is a need for further investigation of this topic. Participants identified several strengths and weaknesses of academic support offices that have a direct impact of the academic support provided to the student-athletes. Some of the strengths included the effectiveness of the tutoring program, knowledgeable staff members and mentoring. Of the responses reported, a couple weaknesses include tutoring availability. One participant responded, with "sometimes inconvenient because I couldn't schedule my times" when asked about their opinion of the tutoring times. This response, and those like it, could be a result of the constricted time that the student-athletes function with on a daily basis. They are challenged to work practices, class, rehabilitation, and meals into their days so the issue of tutoring availability may

be a result of this. The balance of school and athletics is tough for athletes especially when it comes to the relationship they build with their professors and other authoritative figures on campus. In a study completed by Parsons (2013), student-athletes reported that some professors have singled out student-athletes or have discussed student-athletes in general with a negative connotation. Parsons stated, “these remarks characterized athletes as poor students, suggested athletes were only interested in sport and asserted athletes expect special accommodations for missed class” (p. 414).

Since 77% of participants reported that their coach highlighted the importance of the academic services for student-athletes, it is important to take this strong statistic and continue to build upon it. Powell (2009) addressed the pressure placed on coaches to have a winning season. With their coaching careers on the line, this pressure is often transferred to the student-athletes, which could distract them from their studies. Due to these pressures, coaches rely on the academic staff to assist them and student-athletes so it is imperative that the academic staff is meeting and exceeding the needs of the student-athletes so they continue to utilize the services and excel in the classroom. The portion of participants who responded that their coaches have promoted and encouraged the use of academic services supports the evidence produced in Powell’s study that “one particular coach did not influence the usage of support services over another” (p. 92), but that it is a general consensus within the athletic departments that everyone supports and promotes the academic services.

Participants were asked what they feel the academic support office and their academic advisors do well. This question was posed as an open-ended question and was important to include so we are able to evaluate the honest perceptions of student-athletes. The responses to this question were encouraging as the majority of the participants mentioned how their advisor

tries to build a relationship and get to know him/her as a person. One participant noted that their advisor “tr[ies] to know how I am and make a personal relationship with me. They also are always checking up on me and asking how classes are going and letting me know they can always help me.” Several others mentioned that “They help keep our life together” and they really care about each athletes academic success. This feedback is something that advisors should take note of because the personal relationships that advisors build with their student-athletes is something that the student-athletes notice and appreciate.

Implications

This research study has a few potential implications for administrators within intercollegiate athletics. This includes conference commissioners, athletic directors, coaches and academic support personnel. The research questions asked in this study were designed to gain information about the student-athletes perceptions pertaining to academic support services. The results also support the need for continual research in this area of focus to ensure support offices continue to grow with the needs of student-athletes.

Each student-athlete requires different levels of support services from the university pertaining to academics, personal development and career development. This study seems to reveal that the student-athletes in the MAC are satisfied with the support they are receiving. The results provide understanding and insight about day-to-day perceptions of academic support in college student-athletes. Conference commissioners and department athletic directors can analyze the results and either alter their academic support teams or continue to encourage the processes and procedures they are following now.

Staff members of the academic support offices for student-athletes should take these results into consideration and remember to recognize that each student-athlete is different and

will require differing levels of focus and attention. Student-athletes highlighted the importance of the relationship that advisors build with them and they expressed their appreciation for the personalized attention. These small details have a substantial impact on the lives of these young men and women who are working to balance an incredible workload.

Coaches also play a major role in the academic success of student-athletes. Though the coaches are focused on winning games, it is important for them to remember that they also play a crucial role in the personal development of multiple young men and women. They need to ensure they are supporting the academic success of student-athletes by assisting with the balance of athletic rigor and academic achievement.

Limitations

Within this study there were a few limitations that should be noted. One limitation of the study was the sample size of the study. Although the survey was distributed to a large number of student-athletes, the low response rate may not portray an accurate depiction of student-athlete perceptions as a whole from the Mid-American Conference. Also, since this study was focused on universities in this particular conference, the findings may differ for student-athletes from universities in other conferences as institutional size, department funding and academic services provided may vary. Thus, the ability to generalize these findings to other institutions is limited.

Future Directions

Taking into consideration the limitations of the study, there are several things to take into account for future research. Applying a different instrument delivery technique may assist with the issue of low response rates. The survey could be handed out in team meetings to ensure that there is a sufficient participatory rate. Future research should be completed to assess the perceptions of student-athletes who are characteristically the same as the student-athletes in the

MAC as well as those who are different. Replicating similar procedures should be done because different institutions will provide their student-athletes with varying experiences and it is important to understand the perceptions on a wider scale so the academic support offices and academic advising professional community can understand the impact of their efforts.

Conclusions

Education in relationship to intercollegiate athletics is and will continue to be a crucial factor to the success of student-athletes. In order to continue to enhance the academic successes of student-athletes who are participating in intercollegiate athletics, it was important to investigate the perceptions student-athletes have about the academic support office at their institutions. Valuable information has been produced as a result of this study and its results can be applied at the conference and institutional levels. Understanding the perceptions student-athletes have can assist in the evaluation of which and how many services to offer student-athletes.

Literature has underscored the need for enhanced educational experiences for student-athletes. Too many times, student-athletes are overwhelmed with the identity of being an athlete and many times, the academic success of that individual suffers. Further research can focus on what student-athletes struggle with most and determining whether or not support offices are addressing those needs. Ensuring that we, as academic professionals strive to meet the needs of student-athletes, we will be promoting the holistic development of these young men and women so they are able to succeed well beyond graduation.

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APPENDIX A: SURVEY

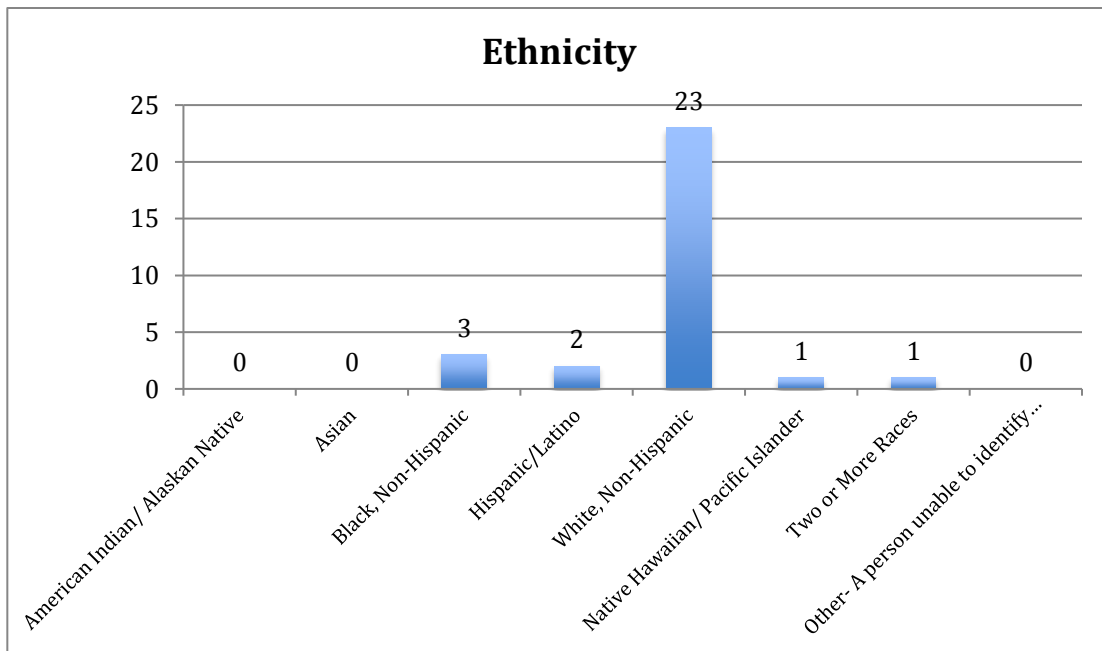
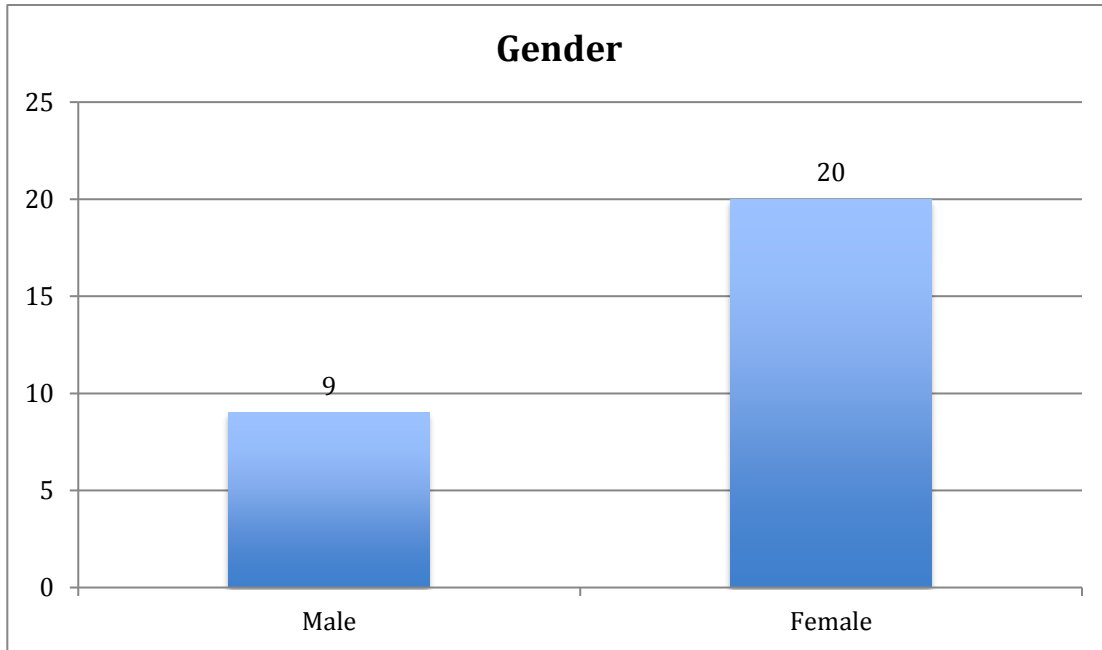
Student-Athlete Perceptions Survey

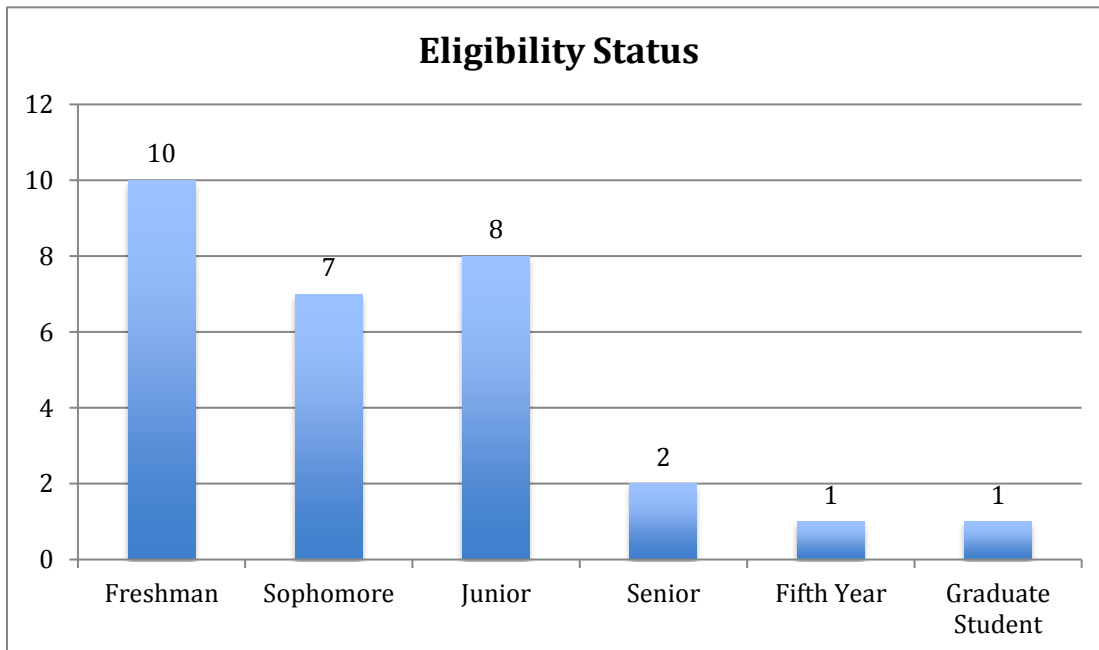
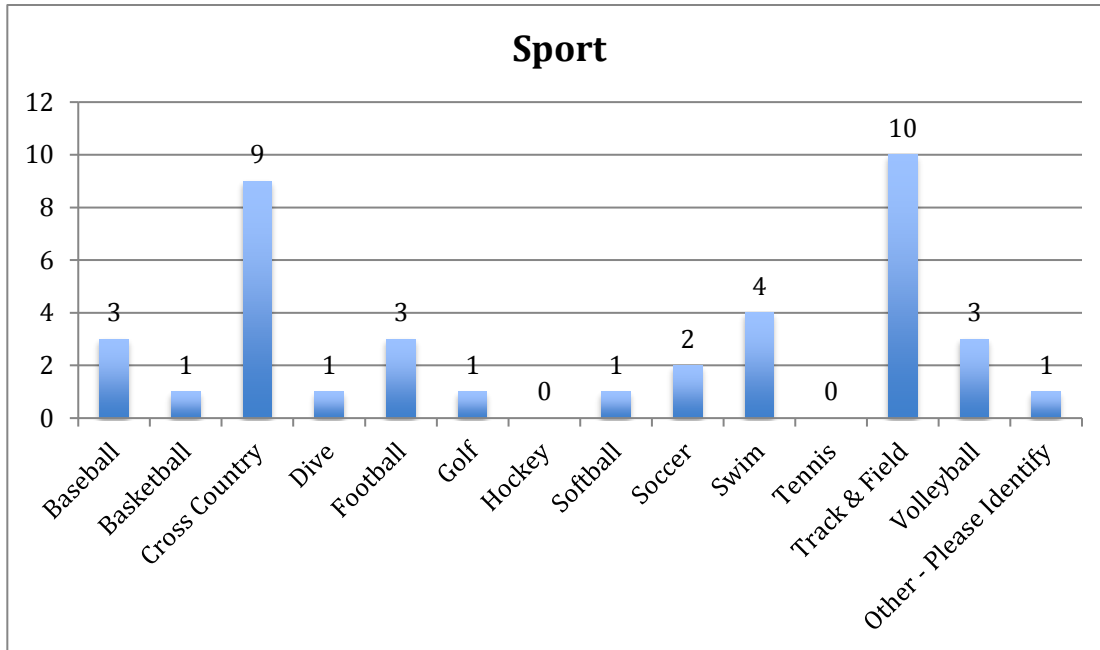
1. What is your gender?
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
 - c. Other
2. What is your current eligibility status?
 - a. Freshman
 - b. Sophomore
 - c. Junior
 - d. Senior
 - e. Fifth Year
 - f. Graduate Student
3. Which best describes your ethnicity?
 - a. American Indian/Alaskan Native
 - b. Asian
 - c. Black, Non-Hispanic
 - d. Hispanic/Latino
 - e. White, Non-Hispanic
 - f. Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
 - g. Two or More Races
 - h. Other - A person unable to identify with above ethnicity categories.
4. In which of the following sport(s) do you participate at the intercollegiate level.
 - a. Baseball
 - b. Basketball
 - c. Cross Country
 - d. Dive
 - e. Football
 - f. Golf
 - g. Hockey
 - h. Softball
 - i. Soccer
 - j. Swim
 - k. Tennis
 - l. Track & Field
 - m. Volleyball
 - n. Other: Please Specify
5. Which of the following services have you sought out in your time at the university?
(please select all that apply)
 - a. Career Advancement

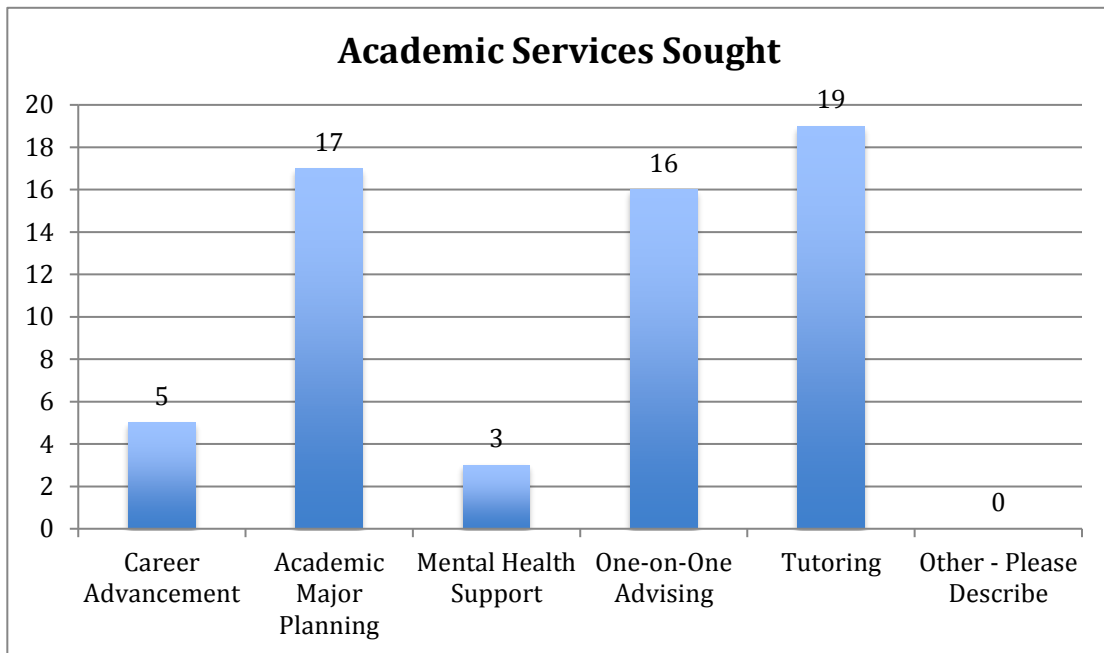
- b. Major Planning
 - c. Mental Health Support
 - d. One-on-One Advising
 - e. Tutoring
 - f. Other (Please describe)
6. Which of the following services do you feel you have benefit from in your time at the university? (please select all that apply)
- a. Career Advancement
 - b. Major Planning
 - c. Mental Health Support
 - d. One-on-One Advising
 - e. Tutoring
 - f. Other
7. How effective is the tutoring program at your institution?
- 5 = extremely effective; 4 = effective; 3 = somewhat effective; 2 = not that effective; 1 = ineffective.
8. Please give your thoughts on the following subtopics:
- a. Subject Tutoring:
 - b. Tutoring Times:
 - c. Tutor's knowledge of subject they are tutoring:
9. Before you enrolled at the university, how important did you believe athletic academic support services office would be to your academic success?
- a. Very important
 - b. Neither important nor unimportant
 - c. Very unimportant
10. Did the coach who recruited you tell you anything specific to expect from the athletic academic support services?
- a. If yes, what did he/she say about the academic services provided?
11. While being recruited, did you include your impression of the athletic academic support services office into your decision to commit to your school?
- a. Yes – please tell us why
 - b. No – please tell us why not
12. How have your perceptions about athletic academic support services office changed since you enrolled in the university?

13. Who on your team's coaching staff is responsible for the team's academic success?
14. How much emphasis is put on the utilization of the student-athlete academic services office by your team/coach?
15. What does your athletic academic advisor do to help you attain academic success?
16. How helpful would you say your athletic academic advisor is?
 - a. Very helpful
 - b. Helpful
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Not very helpful
 - e. Not helpful at all
17. Based on your experiences, what would you say the athletic academic support services office does well? Please be specific.
18. Based on your experiences, are there any aspects of the athletic academic support services office that do not meet your expectations or that you feel could be improved upon? Please be specific.
19. Are there any additional support services from which you feel you would benefit? Please explain.
20. Do you have an academic advisor in your major?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
21. Is there anything or anyone else who provides support services for your academic success? Please be specific.

APPENDIX B: Charts







APPENDIX C: HSRB APPROVAL



BOWLING GREEN STATE UNIVERSITY

Office of Research Compliance

DATE: January 8, 2016
 TO: Marissa Tashenberg
 FROM: Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board

 PROJECT TITLE: [815200-4] Student-athlete perceptions of academic support services at MAC institutions

 SUBMISSION TYPE: Amendment/Modification

 ACTION: APPROVED
 APPROVAL DATE: January 8, 2016
 EXPIRATION DATE: October 19, 2016
 REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

 REVIEW CATEGORY: Expedited review category # 7

Thank you for your submission of Amendment/Modification materials for this project. The Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

The final approved version of the consent document(s) is available as a published Board Document in the Review Details page. You must use the approved version of the consent document when obtaining consent from participants. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that you are responsible to conduct the study as approved by the HSRB. If you seek to make any changes in your project activities or procedures, those modifications must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the modification request form for this procedure.

You have been approved to enroll 400 participants. If you wish to enroll additional participants you must seek approval from the HSRB.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must also be reported promptly

to this office.

This approval expires on October 19, 2016. You will receive a continuing review notice before your project expires. If you wish to continue your work after the expiration date, your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date.

Good luck with your work. If you have any questions, please contact the Office of Research Compliance at 419-372-7716 or hsrb@bgsu.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence regarding this project.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board's records.

APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM



BOWLING GREEN STATE UNIVERSITY

School of Human Movement, Sport, & Leisure Studies

227C Eppler Complex
Bowling Green, Ohio 43403-0280

419-372-3165

<http://www.bgsu.edu/colleges/edhd/hmsls/index.html>

Project Title: Student-athlete perceptions of academic support services at MAC institutions

Researcher: Marissa Tashenberg, Graduate Student, Sport Administration

Advisor: Dr. Amanda Paule-Koba, Associate Professor, Human Movement, Sport & Leisure Studies

Study Purpose and Procedure

You are being asked to voluntarily participate in my research study that I am completing for my Master's project. This study is going to evaluate how student-athletes view the academic support services provided to them. The goal of my research is to assist academic support services staff understand how the student-athletes views the quality of services being provided, which may improve the quality of work produced in such an environment. This study may also assist athletic departments and conference offices when training and educating the staff that is providing these services to the student-athletes.

The minimum age to participate in this study is 18 years of age. If you agree to participate, your involvement will include completing a questionnaire, which will take approximately 15 minutes to complete. There are roughly 20 questions that you may answer, some short answers and some extended answers. The researcher has provided the link to the questionnaire at the bottom of this letter; you may complete the questionnaire at your convenience. Completing the questionnaire will conclude your involvement in the study

If you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. You may decide to skip questions, or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. Deciding to participate or not will not affect you or your relationship with the university. The risks of participating in this study are no greater than what is expected in daily life.

The data will be stored on the primary researcher's advisors office computer that is kept in her University office. No identifiable information will be asked of participants. If the participant happens to include any information that may reveal his/her identify, the researcher will remove this information in any written or oral presentations of the data. Names of participants will not be used. Please be sure to clear your Internet browser and page history after taking the survey. Please do not to put any identifying information into the open-ended responses of the questionnaire.

Please contact Marissa Tashenberg at (419) 260-2537 or mtashen@bgsu.edu if you have any questions about the research or your participation in the research study. You may also contact the advisor, Dr. Amanda Paule-Koba at (419) 372-7229 or apaule@bgsu.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research, you may contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Board at (419) 372-7716 or hsrb@bgsu.edu. Thank you for your time and willingness to participate.

I have been informed of the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits of this study. I have had the opportunity to have all my questions answered and I have been informed that my participation is completely voluntary. I agree to participate in this research.

The completion of the questionnaire indicates your consent to participate.

APPENDIX E: INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETICS COMMITTEE RESEARCH
SUBCOMMITTEE APPROVAL

January 4, 2016

MEMORANDUM

To: Marissa Tashenberg
Master's Degree Candidate in Human Movement Sport & Leisure Studies

From: Lee A. Meserve
For the ICA Research Subcommittee

Re: Your Proposal to Do Research Using Student-Athletes
Project title: Student-athlete perceptions of academic support services at
MAC institutions.

The Intercollegiate Athletics Committee Research Subcommittee has reviewed your proposal to use BGSU student-athletes as subjects for your research project, the title of which is mentioned above. The ICA Research Subcommittee approves your use of student-athletes to collect the data for this project. Best wishes for successful collection of data and information. The Intercollegiate Athletics Committee Research Subcommittee would be interested in your findings, and would request that you provide us with a summary of the findings of this study at its completion.

ec: Hillary Snyder, Compliance Office
ICA Committee Research Subcommittee
Chris Kingston, Director of Intercollegiate Athletics
Amanda Koba, Ph.D., HMSLS
Chet Hesson, Asst. AD for Academics & Student Services